Tompkins County DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

125 East Court Street Ithaca, New York 14850 (607) 274-5551 Fax (607) 274-5558 http://www.tompkins-co.org/

* * * *

February 22, 2001

RE: Lead agency designation for the Tompkins County Public Safety Communications System Project and release of Draft Scope for public comment

Dear Sir/Madam:

Tompkins County is seeking to replace the communication system currently in use by public safety (fire, EMS and police) officials and other government agencies countywide. The current system, composed of several independent systems woven together to provide for voice and data transfer, is thirty to forty years old and incorporates dozens of isolated radio frequencies, many of which are incompatible. Currently, much of the primary system used for voice communication uses an analog signal which makes it prone to interference; it is also becoming increasingly obsolete due to the Federal Communications Commission's actions narrowing bandwidth.

PROJECT HISTORY

To address the inadequacies of the current public safety communications system, the County Board of Representatives commissioned the New York State Technology Enterprise Corporation (NYSTEC) to examine the County's current communication system and make recommendations as to the future of Tompkins County Public Safety Communications System project (herein referred to as the Project). NYSTEC and the County have taken a two-phased approach to this Project, the format of which follows:

PHASE I: Preliminary Assessments and Evaluations During Phase I of this Project, NYSTEC prepared a series of reports for the County, including: (1) a Communication Needs Analysis and Site Audit, to help define current and future communication needs of County public safety and other agencies; (2) a Geographic and Demographic Assessment of the County, as they relate to coverage challenges in the County; and, (3) an Evaluation of Wireless Communication Options to determine which technological options (e.g. trunked-UHF, satellite, cellular, PCS etc.) are most suitable for meeting the County's needs. In January 2001, NYSTEC presented its Phase I findings to the County. After reviewing various technological options and the County's current and future needs, NYSTEC recommended the County should: (1) move forward with the design and development of an 800-megahertz (MHz) frequency, trunked communication system; and, (2) continue to coordinate with the New York State Office of Technology's Statewide Wireless Network (SWN) efforts to provide a public communication system throughout New York State. Discussion of these reports and recommendations will be presented in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The Environmental Impact Statement for this project will explore all suitable technology and system alternatives that meet the needs and requirements of the County. During project development, various technologies, phased approaches, and cost-sharing opportunities (e.g. public/private partnerships, SWN) will be explored and analyzed, as well as the potential environmental impacts. This information will help define the County's requirements and form the basis of a Request for Proposals (RFP) from vendors with expertise in communication system design and layout. Responses from vendors will help determine the specific alternatives to be evaluated in the draft EIS. While some alternatives are known at this time, others may arise during project development, or from responses to the RFP; these will also be evaluated in the draft EIS. The proposed action will be selected from these alternatives.

PROPOSED ACTION / LEAD AGENCY DESIGNATION

Based on the studies completed to date, the County Board of Representatives has determined that a wireless communication system may have a significant adverse impact and therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared. Attached is County Board Resolution No. 307 of December 19, 2000 requesting that the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) process be initiated, that a positive declaration (determination of significance) be issued, and that the Tompkins County Board of Representatives be established as lead agency for the environmental review of the Public Safety Communications System project.

As lead agency and project sponsor, the Tompkins County Board of Representatives will be responsible for the approval, funding, and coordinated review of this project during the EIS process. Please notify the County Planning Department by March 26, 2001, if you represent an interested agency. At this time, the County is not aware of any other involved agencies. If no response is received, it will be assumed that you concur with the lead agency designation and are not an interested or involved agency.

_

¹ Definition of this term can be found in 6 NYCRR 617.2.

² Definition of this term can be found in 6 NYCRR 617.2.

DRAFT SCOPE

To facilitate the development of the draft EIS for this project, the County is initiating the scoping process as outlined in SEQR. Enclosed, please find the Draft Scope for public comment. Also enclosed, is a copy of the Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) for this project. Due to the complexity of wireless communication and the variety of potential alternatives, the enclosed EAF does not address site-specific questions, because sites are unknown at this time. These impacts will be identified, and mitigation measures will be outlined, through the EIS process.

The County has established a thirty-day public comment period for the Draft Scope. Please submit all comments, in writing, to the County Planning Department, 121 East Court Street, Ithaca, NY 14850, by 5:00 p.m. on March 26, 2001.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information on this project, please visit the County's project website at: www.tompkins-co.org/pubinfo/pscs. Also, please feel free to contact the County Planning Department (274-5560) with questions, or for more information.

Sincerely,

Mr. Stephen Whicher, County Administrator